

**Testimony Opposing Reduced Appropriations for the Department of Developmental
Services, and Mental Health and Addiction Services
H.B. 6824: An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2015**

Dear Senator,

I am writing on behalf of the individuals I serve as a direct support staff member, and on behalf of my fellow co-workers working alongside with me in the private sector. I am in opposition to the Governor's proposed cuts to these programs and services that benefit children and families funded through the Department of Developmental Services, and Mental Health and Addiction Services. The massive cuts that have been proposed to these programs will have a negative effect on the members who receive these services along with the staff that work there. If anything these programs deserve an INCREASE in their budgets not the opposite.

Already, in the past year working with the DDS population, I have had to watch two of my program participants pass away, not because they were too old, or had a terminal illness. These individuals were two elderly woman, who if provided the proper care possibly would still be here to this day. The lack of available funds, to provide these women with the best medical care, in my opinion, is what caused them to have an early passing and not receive a respectful burial. Both women, passed with the same causes stemming from aspiration pneumonia. Due to the lack of funding and their title 19, unable to cover their necessary medical costs, it was decided that they remain home and be provided hospice care, by us, the staff that work in the home.

I could tell you, I am not a RN, nor do I feel that I have the proper credentials to even provide this type of care. In order to work at my job, all you need is a high school diploma, a clean driving record, and receive a week's worth of training, on the most basic skills needed, when it comes to total care for an individual. I will admit I have learned a lot, but not enough to have a person's life resting on my shoulders. After working in this particular group home for just under 4 years, and working alongside these to ladies, they grew on me like my own family.

Miss T, we used to call one of the residents, she was non-verbal, blind, and was on puree consistencies for her food, and needed to be spoon-fed all her meals. She required total care for all her basic hygienic needs; she also needed to have her meds administered three times a day. Miss T, suffered from a cough for nearly 4 weeks straight, which was being treated with Robitussin, as instructed by our house nurse. We all knew something worse had to be going on, but no one knew what exactly was wrong. After staff sent Miss T out to the hospital 3x in one week. It was finally discovered that she had aspirated and had a severe case of pneumonia. She was hospitalized for two months before returning home, and later we found out that she had also been diagnosed with congestive heart failure. Miss T, was only 60 years old, and seemed to be falling apart right before my own eyes. Those last few weeks were horrible, and all I could do was cry.

We were instructed to provide her liquid morphine under her tongue to help ease the pain, I had never done hospice care before and was terrified of the inevitable outcome. The visiting nurses only came by

once/twice a week and it was agreed that it was best for her to remain home while receiving this kind of care. I watched her suffer in pain, rocking back in forth in her room that last Sunday in August I had worked with her, and had to administer the morphine. I was so scared and nervous that she might pass right there at that very moment. Whatever I had done helped to ease her pain for the time I was there. Miss T, passed the following Monday at home in her bedroom, and was never given a proper burial nor, did we even have a real memorial service. Miss T, was cremated, and her ashes given to her few remaining relatives.

These chains of events have brought me to this very room as I am speaking, it is why I know in my heart that these budget cuts are and will be a detriment to the overall well-being for those that receive these services. If these cuts go into effect, the lack of funding will not allow others like Miss T, to be provided with the highest possible care. If anything, we need an increase in the budget, so that individuals who live in these homes, that have staff like myself, working in them, can be provided the proper training needed to allow us to be able to know how to work in these kinds of conditions. An increase to the budget, will also allow people like Miss T, enough money to know that she can, and will be taken care of with the utmost care.

These monies that help fund the private sector and the state programs are necessary in keeping these programs open and able to provide the proper services to so many individuals who are unable to take care of themselves. I, ask you Senator, and all members of the general assembly to ask yourself this one question. What if Miss T, was your mom, your grandmother, your sister, your aunt or even your daughter? Is this the kind of treatment you would want for your loved ones? Please help stop these cuts from going into effect as of June 30, 2015, so people like Miss T, can have and receive the proper care and respect that all of us deserve, and to allow programs to be able to provide the appropriate staffing needs and quality care for all the individuals we serve.

Sincerely,

Christina Koutsopoulos

Direct Support Staff